

E. BARRETT PRETTYMAN UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE ANNEX

333 Constitution Avenue, NW,
Washington, D.C.

Report to the General Services Administration

June 3, 1999

Abstract

The General Services Administration has submitted revised preliminary building plans for the annex to the E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse. Revisions specifically address those aspects of the building elevations that the Commission excepted from its approval of the preliminary site and building plans at its April 8, 1999 meeting.

The revisions successfully address the majority of the concerns expressed by the Commission. Although staff continues to desire that the Third Street entrance be given more identity, this can be addressed in the normal development of the final site and building plans.

Authority

D.C. Code, sec. 5-432 and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended (40 U.S.C. 71(d)).

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves** the revised preliminary building plans for the annex to the E. Barrett Prettyman United States Courthouse, 333 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.21(38.00) – 40637.
- **Requests** that, in the preparation of final site and building plans, GSA and its design team:
 - Continue to study ways to increase the identity of the Third Street entrance.
 - Continue to study the size and form of the proposed sculpture on the face of the vaults.
 - Develop an exterior lighting plan, specifically the lighting of the Third Street entrance, and the consideration of lighting to emphasize the existing main entrance to the Courthouse.
 - Provide a model illustrating the building articulation, façade, fenestration and entrance treatments.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED REVISIONS

The General Services Administration (GSA) has submitted revised preliminary building plans that specifically address those aspects of the building elevations that the Commission excepted from its approval of the preliminary site and building plans for the annex to the E. Barrett Prettyman United States Courthouse at 333 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C.



*Rendering of the proposed Courthouse Annex
viewed from the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Third Street, NW*

The Rotunda:

The revised design of the rotunda incorporates a revision of the design of the base, the redesign of the windows on the top floor, and an increase in the height of the roof.

- The columns at the base of the rotunda have been redesigned to reflect their size and spacing in the upper floors. The windows in the base have also been redesigned to better relate to the design and placement of the windows in the façade.
- A greater number of windows have been incorporated in the design of the top floor of the rotunda. The location of these windows reflects the spacing of the columns in the lower floors.
- The height of the roof of the rotunda has been increased approximately five feet and the roof pitch has been varied to imply a sense of curvature.

The Atrium:

- The south window wall of the atrium has been redesigned to incorporate more glazing.
- Copper cladding has been added throughout.

The Third Street Elevation:

The base of the building has been refined to provide a more successful transition throughout the length of the block. Identification of the Third Street entrance has been improved.

- The windows located in the base of the northern “courtset” bay have been changed to clearstory windows to better relate to grade in this location.
- Identification of the Third Street entrance within the loggia is clarified through the elimination of the windows and the incorporation of “blind” niches on both sides of the entry doors within the loggia.
- Projections (canopies) that extend approximately three feet over the sidewalk are proposed at the first floor transoms on each bay of the loggia.
- The entrance is further identified through the use of lighting and color, and the addition of flags (located over the entrance). Streetscape design varies the tree spacing and incorporates special paving and bollards to mark the entrance. Curbside parking will be restricted in this area.

C Street Elevation:

- The design of the window treatments on the C Street façade has been simplified through the incorporation of fewer window variations.
- Additional glazing has been added to the three-story pedestrian. The bridge is clad in copper.

CONSULTATION WITH GSA

Subsequent to the Commission’s review and approval of the preliminary site and building plans, staff met with GSA and its design team to review and comment on the evolution of the design of the revisions.

Consultation achieved the following:

- Review of design alternatives for revision of the base of the rotunda and agreement on a preferred design.
- Review and discussion of design alternatives for revision of the windows on the top floor of the rotunda. The previously proposed design incorporating a greater number of windows continued to be favored over the newer alternatives and the architects agreed to study several additional design variations.

- Review of alternatives that proposed raising the height of the rotunda roof four to five feet and seven feet, and studies to both maintain a constant pitch and vary the pitch of the steps in the roof. Agreement was reached on a preferred design of an approximate five-foot increase in height with varied pitch.
- Concurrence on the redesign of the atrium incorporating additional glazing and the addition of copper cladding throughout.
- Review of the elements proposed to enhance the identity of the Third Street entrance, e.g. lighting, flags, special paving, bollards, etc. Staff did not feel that these elements went far enough in this regard and various architectural revisions were described including differentiation of the plane of the building at the entrance, differentiating the three entrance bays of the loggia, changes in materials and colors, and other revisions that might be incorporated.
- Revisions to the C Street elevation were reviewed and a preferred design of the three-story pedestrian bridge was agreed upon.

EVALUATION

The revised preliminary building plans for the annex to the E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse. specifically address those aspects of the building elevations that the Commission excepted from its approval of the preliminary site and building plans.

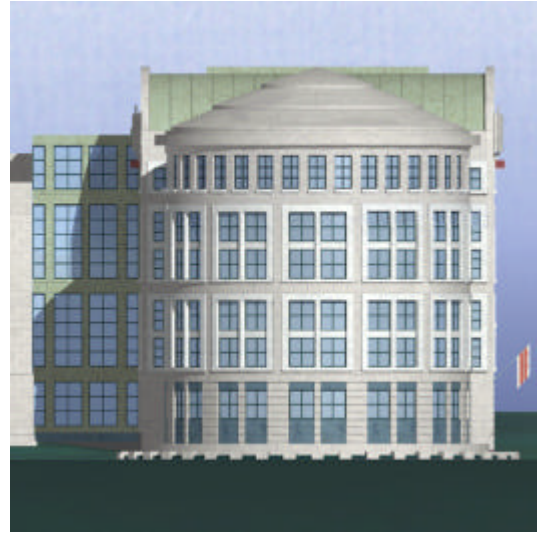
The revisions successfully address the majority of the concerns expressed by the Commission. Staff feels comfortable that, through continued consultation with GSA and their architects, those concerns that remain can be addressed in the normal development of the final site and building plans.

The Rotunda:

The revised design of the rotunda - specifically revision of the design of the base, the redesign of the windows on the top floor, and an increase in the height of the roof - has resulted in a scale, proportion and detailing that is felt to make a statement appropriate to the future landmark status of this element of the building.

- The columns at the base of the rotunda have been redesigned to reflect their size and spacing in the upper floors. This provides a more substantial base to the rotunda. The windows in the base have also been redesigned to better relate to the design and placement of the windows in the façade above. The design of the rotunda appears more harmonious.

- A greater number of windows have been incorporated in the design of the top floor of the rotunda. The location of these windows reflects the spacing of the columns in the lower floors. Distinctly different from the top floor windows of both the existing courthouse and those proposed for the top floor of the main annex, these windows help set the rotunda apart. This design is also felt to relieve the apparent weight of the dome and to reduce the overall perception of the mass of the rotunda.
- The stylized, stepped flat roof of the rotunda is compatible and does not compete with other roof forms in the area. The increased height of the roof and the varied roof pitch appears more comfortable in relation to the proportions of the rotunda. The increased height also enhances both the view from the street and distant views of the rotunda.



*South Elevation of the Rotunda
incorporating design changes in the base,
top floor windows and height of the roof.*

The Atrium:

- The design of the south window wall of the atrium is improved by the incorporation of additional glazing and carrying the glazing closer to grade. The copper cladding has also been expanded to include the entire façade. These changes serve to further reinforce the transitional nature of this façade.

The Third Street Elevation:

The base of the building has been refined to provide a more successful transition throughout the length of the block.

- The windows located in the base of the northern “courtset” bay have been changed to clearstory windows to better relate to grade in this location.

The presence of the loggia and identification of the Third Street entrance within the loggia have been improved.

- Although removal of the windows from the rear wall of the loggia in the bays flanking the entrance doors may be helpful in clarification of the location of the entrance. If determined to be detrimental to other aspects of the building, these windows should not be removed.
- By projecting beyond the plane of the building, the canopies proposed at the first floor transoms may help reinforce the overall presence of the loggia. However, staff feels that their inclusion on only the center three bays would better mark the Third Street entrance.

- The entrance is further identified through the use of lighting and color, and the addition of flags at the entrance. Staff is concerned that additional “accessory” elements may detract from, not add to, a clear expression of the entrance.



*Rendering of proposed changes to the loggia
designed to enhance the identity of the Third Street entrance*

While acknowledging that the above elements serve to provide additional identity to the entrance, staff continues to feel that the presence of this entrance can be further enhanced through a change in the design of the loggia - a minor change in one element or another – possibly limiting the projections (canopies) to the center three bays and/or removal of the transoms in the other bays. Staff feels that this concern can be addressed in the normal development of the final site and building plans.

C Street Elevation:

- The design of the window treatments on the C Street façade has been improved through a reduction in the number of window variations.
- Additional glazing has been added to the three-story pedestrian bridge element. This design better relates to the glazed wall of the atrium that is located immediately behind this bridge. Both the atrium and the bridge serve as transitional elements between the existing courthouse and the annex.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

- On October 1, 1998, the National Capital Planning Commission approved the concept submission for the courthouse annex, specifically approving the proposed location and massing.
- At its meeting on April 8, 1999, the Commission approved the preliminary site and building plans for the annex, except for specific elements of the elevations, and requested that, in the further development of the preliminary building elevations, the General Services Administration and their design team restudy and refine these elements and submit revised building plans.

COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

- At its September 17, 1998 meeting, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) approved concept plans for the annex.
- At its March 23, 1999 meeting CFA reviewed the preliminary design of the annex. In general, the members were pleased with the development of the concept. The one concern focused on the lack of presence of the Third Street entrance.
- At its May 20, 1999 meeting CFA reviewed and approved revisions to the preliminary design of the annex. CFA reiterated their desire that the Third Street entrance be given more presence.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on March 10, 1999, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposed Annex is consistent with the policies of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

Federal Capital Improvement Program

The courthouse annex is included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program, Fiscal Years, 1999-2003, adopted by the Commission at its meeting on July 9, 1998.

The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Plan

Under the 1974 Pennsylvania Avenue Development Plan, the site (Square 533) would continue to be designated for use as a federal courthouse.

Historic Preservation

GSA has determined that the proposed annex may have an adverse effect on the existing United States Courthouse. Consultation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office is ongoing with GSA and their design team.

Environmental Impact

Pursuant to P.L. 91-190, GSA has determined that the proposed annex does not require an Environmental Impact Statement.

The project qualifies as a categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with Order PBS 1095.4C and the GSA NEPA Compliance Guide. A checklist categorical review conducted by GSA concluded the action would adhere to all conditions required to make this determination.